United Nations A/58/PV.67

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

67th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 2 December 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 37 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/278 and A/58/416)

Draft resolutions (A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28)

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and the acceding countries, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the associated countries, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, as well as Iceland, a member of the European Free Trade Association that is a member of the European Economic Area, which all align themselves with this statement.

For more than half a century, the General Assembly has devoted continued, focused attention to the situation in the Middle East. Sadly, however, during that lengthy period the Middle East has remained in a state of serious crisis. As it did half a century ago, the epicentre of the crisis remains the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The European Union outlined its view on the tragic events that continue to unfold in the occupied territories during the debate on the question of Palestine. I therefore merely wish to underscore the European Union's firm belief that it is only through negotiations that a peaceful and just settlement of the conflict in the Middle East can be achieved.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the situation in the region and has noted that, despite the international community's support for the quest for a just and lasting solution, the parties concerned have not made sufficient efforts to seize opportunities for peace. In particular, it is regrettable that they have not seized the opportunity afforded by the performance-based road map indicating a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, presented by the Quartet to the parties on 30 April 2003. We therefore call once again on both parties — Israel and the Palestinian Authority — to live up to the commitments they undertook in that regard at the Aqaba Summit on 4 June 2003.

The European Union is firmly committed to the clear objective of two States — Israel and a viable and democratic Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security, within the framework of a comprehensive Middle East peace as laid out in the road map. In that regard, the European Union welcomes and underscores the unanimous endorsement of the road map made by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003).

The European Union also urges all sides in the region to immediately implement policies conducive to dialogue and negotiation. The European Union's relations with those that take steps in a contrary direction will inevitably be affected by such behaviour.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

03-63591 (E)

The European Union strongly condemns the suicide attacks and other acts of violence that have occurred over the last few months and calls on all sides to refrain from any provocative action that could further exacerbate tensions and escalate the situation. The European Union reiterates that it is the duty of all countries, including those in the region, to cease harbouring and supporting, including through fund-raising or financial assistance, any groups and individuals that use terror and violence to advance their goals. Terrorist attacks against Israel have no justification whatsoever and damage the legitimate Palestinian national cause. The European Union emphasizes once again that, in compliance with the road map, the Palestinian leadership must concretely demonstrate its determination in the fight against extremist violence and urges the Palestinian Government and the Palestinian President to take immediate steps to confront individuals and groups conducting and planning terrorist attacks. The European Union still believes that Palestinian security services should be consolidated under the control of the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister.

While recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, the European Union once again urges the Government of Israel, in exercising that right, to fully respect international law, in particular human rights and international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, to take maximum precautions to avoid civilian casualties and to take no action that aggravates the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people. It also calls on Israel to abstain from any punitive measures that are not in accordance with international law, including extrajudicial killings.

The European Union is particularly concerned by the route marked out for the so-called security wall in the occupied West Bank. The envisaged departure of the route from the Green Line could prejudge future negotiations and make the two-State solution physically impossible to implement. In addition, it will cause further humanitarian and economic hardship to the Palestinians: thousands of Palestinians west of the wall will be cut off from essential services in the West Bank, while Palestinians east of the wall will lose access to their land and water resources. In that regard, the European Union notes with concern the findings of the Secretary-General's report on the situation (A/ES-10/248), made pursuant General Assembly resolution ES-10/13.

The European Union calls on Israel to stop and reverse its settlement policy and to immediately dismantle settlements built after March 2001. We also call on Israel to lift the blockade on the occupied territories and withdraw its forces from Palestinian cities to the positions held prior to September 2000. Moreover, Israel must ensure full, safe and unfettered access of humanitarian personnel and assistance to the occupied territories, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The European Union believes that a final peace settlement in the Middle East must be comprehensive and will not be complete without including a final Israeli peace settlement with Syria and Lebanon. We urge Israel, Syria and Lebanon to resume negotiations as soon as possible with the aim of reaching an agreement and we urge all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that damage the prospects for the peace process as a whole.

In May 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces from south Lebanon, in line with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Even though the situation there has been characterized by a state of relative calm, serious violations of the ceasefire continue to occur. It is essential that the Lebanese Government fulfil its responsibility under that resolution and reinstate its effective authority over all of southern Lebanon, including by deploying its forces along the Blue Line, in order to restore peace and security in the area. For its part, Israel must stop the repeated air violations of the Blue Line, which are unjustified and a cause of great concern to the civilian population. Furthermore, both parties must ensure the safety of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) personnel, as well as their full freedom of movement in discharging UNIFIL's mandate.

In addition to their active engagement in the Middle East peace process through the Quartet, the European Union takes a strong interest in the development of the Mediterranean region as a whole and in maintaining close and long-standing ties with its countries, as exemplified by the ongoing Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Naples. Through the Barcelona Process, the European Union aims to play its full part in ensuring peace, stability, security, as well as a sustainable and balanced

onomic and social development, in the editerraneaa region.

In conclusion, the European Union reiterates its termination to contribute to a just and lasting ttlement of the situation in the Middle East, based on ited Nations Security Council resolutions 242 967), 338 (1973) 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 003), the terms of reference of the Madrid nference, in particular the principle of land for ace, the Arab peace initiative, endorsed at the Arab ague Summit in Beirut, and the road map presented the Quartet to the parties on 30 April 2003. In ticular, in that regard, it stresses the importance and urgency of setting up of a credible and effective rd-party monitoring mechanism composed of all mbers of the Quartet.

Ms. Knowles (Australia): When Australia spoke t year on this item the situation in the Middle East s grim. We began our statement by expressing my vernment's condolences to the peoples of Kenya and ael, following the terrible terrorist attacks in mbasa. We all hoped then that by now reason would e prevailed and that we might have seen an end to h barbarous acts.

But this year we again have to express the stralian Government's deepest condolences — this e to the Governments and peoples of Turkey and di Arabia — for the deplorable attacks in Istanbul Riyadh in the past month. An Australian citizen s among the dead in Turkey. In October, Australia, onesia and other countries marked the first iversary of the 2002 Bali bombings. Those alling acts have been rightly condemned by ernments around the world and here in the United tions. It is imperative that we work together fsively to eradicate the scourge of terrorism, but is not the only cause for concern in the Middle t.

Australia is one of a large coalition of countries porting rehabilitation and stabilization efforts in . Addressing Saddam's legacy of oppression and se is a major challenge. There are also groups that stop at nothing to impede Iraq's transition to a ocratic, peaceful and prosperous nation — as the nt deaths of Spanish and Japanese officials sadly onstrate. However, it is not all bad news from Iraq. dy progress is being made on rehabilitation, Iraqis increasingly taking responsibility for their security, and a new timetable has been agreed that will accelerate the return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people. Australia and its coalition partners are determined to stay the course in Iraq.

Recently, the international community has been faced with the need to address revelations of the extent of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear activities. Australia welcomes the adoption by consensus on 26 November by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a resolution on Iran's nuclear programme. The resolution acknowledges positively Iran's 21 October promises of full cooperation with IAEA, suspension of uranium enrichment and reprocessing and signature and immediate adherence to a safeguards-strengthening Additional Protocol. The resolution also calls on Iran to take corrective measures and cooperate fully with IAEA. It is in the interests of both Iran and the non-proliferation regime that Iran heed that clear message.

Australia has consistently supported efforts to resolve the tragic Israeli-Palestinian dispute. There can be no military solution to the conflict, just as there is no alternative to a negotiated settlement. While we are strongly committed to Israel's right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, Australia has also consistently supported the emergence of a viable Palestinian State living at peace with its neighbour Israel. Our position is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the principle of land for peace.

Australia is a strong supporter of the road map to Middle East peace and we therefore welcome Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). We call on both sides to return to negotiations and resume implementation of the road map without delay. The road map sets out the path to Palestinian statehood. To realize that legitimate aspiration, however, the Palestinian Authority must take firm action to end the violence.

The situation in the Middle East today presents a major challenge for its inhabitants and the wider international community. Let us not give in to the fatal temptation of seeing terrorist acts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other calamities as inevitable. It is now more important than ever that the international community and the United Nations work together to overcome the destructive forces in the Middle East and build a better future for all its peoples.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For more than half a century the situation in the Middle East has remained the focus of intense United Nations attention. Regrettably, during that time we have not been able to achieve a just and lasting settlement in the region. The outcome this year again continues to be ongoing tensions in the Palestinian-Israeli crisis and in general a difficult atmosphere in the relations between Israel and the Arab States. As a result, past gains acquired in the Middle East peace process have been lost and it has become increasingly difficult to resume negotiations. Moreover, there were fears of an emerging regionalization of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which could spill over to other States.

Given that situation, Russia calls on the Palestinians and Israelis to take immediate steps towards the easing of tensions and resumption of negotiations on political and security issues. We anticipate that the parties will be able to establish a high-level political dialogue, place the situation in a non-confrontational context and move towards the normalization of relations.

We are confident that the path to that goal lies in the unswerving implementation by the parties of the road map drafted by the Quartet — that is, Russia, the United States of America, the European Union and the United Nations — as adopted by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003). Above all the Palestinian Authority needs to take effective measures to end acts by extremists and terrorists, who have killed peaceful civilians. Israel, for its part, must refrain from the disproportionate use of force and extrajudicial killings and take effective steps to ease the economic burden of the Palestinian people, who have been beset by a deep humanitarian disaster. Israel's practice of building settlements in the occupied territories and their construction of a separation wall on that territory continue to present serious impediments to a settlement.

Thus, by taking those types of parallel steps, the Palestinians and the Israelis will necessarily build up their respective capacities for mutual trust, opening the door to achieving the strategic goal — a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the principles of the Madrid Conference and previously reached agreements. That presupposes, of course, the resumption of talks on all tracks, including with Syria and Lebanon.

That approach also requires stepping up multilateral efforts with effective assistance from the United Nations. Russia, as a member of the Quartet, will continue to actively contribute to improving the situation in the Middle East, working to that end with the United Nations, the United States and the European Union, as well as the Arab countries, in seeking a final settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of a two-State solution, with a Palestinian State and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. Russia is sincerely interested in achieving specifically that type of settlement — one which would strengthen security and stability throughout the Middle East region and enable all its inhabitants to develop in an atmosphere of stability and good-neighbourliness.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is debating one of the most important items on its agenda because it is closely linked to international peace and security. Despite its vitality and importance, for many decades the Middle East has not enjoyed stability, because of the wars that have befallen it — bleeding its peoples and States of their capabilities, potential and resources.

Perhaps the gravest difficulty the region faces — the gravest threat to its peace and security — is the intransigent stance of the Israeli Government in pursuing illegal policies and practices and its refusal to respond to peace initiatives. Israel continues to create further obstacles for international initiatives aimed at finding a just, comprehensive and durable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israeli Government, under Sharon, has taken an approach based on the use of force to impose security, as it continues to occupy Arab and Palestinian lands. That equation has been proved by events to be a failure. Its continuation will only lead to further deterioration in the economic, security and political situation in the region. The Israeli Government must realize that violence merely generates violence and that Israeli policies and practices based on imposing a status quo on the ground must end if Israel truly wishes the peace that we all long for.

It is not reasonable that the international community should be swayed by the pretexts and manoeuvres fabricated by Israel — time and again using the excuse that it needs to maintain its security — while its fundamental objective is to

distance us from a consideration of the crux of the conflict, which is the continuing occupation.

Israel rejected the Arab peace initiative adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut last year, which was welcomed by the international community. Israel registered 14 reservations to the road map, which was formulated by the Quartet and was widely supported by the international community and recently endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003).

Israel did not stop at rejecting each and every initiative. Israel feverishly attempts to consolidate its occupation of Palestinian lands and to escalate the situation through continuing raids inside the West Bank and Gaza. Israel has reoccupied areas under the Palestinian Authority and continues to build settlements, to expropriate land, to demolish homes and to practice a policy of assassination of Palestinian leaders. It continues to lay siege to the occupied territories, thus escalating the suffering of the Palestinian people and contributing to a decline in their standard of living, as more than 60 per cent of them live below poverty level.

Israel knows full well that its policies and practices have been condemned by the international community for running counter to international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations. Israel, however, obstinately refuses to heed that condemnation. It continues to build a wall inside the Palestinian territories, which, if not stopped, will be an obstacle to reaching a peaceful settlement leading to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

The Secretary-General reaffirmed that position in his report to the General Assembly on the separation wall (A/ES-10/248). The continued construction of the wall in clear defiance of the wishes of the international community and United Nations resolutions proves that Israel continues to pursue a policy of fait accompli and is not taking any steps to build Palestinian confidence in Israeli actions.

International reports show that the wall not only expropriates Palestinian lands, indeed, it will isolate Palestinian areas from each other and prevent the movement of civilians to their farms, schools and work.

Kuwait strongly condemns all acts of violence and barbaric practices by the Israeli Government against the Palestinians. We call on the Israeli Government to cease its policies of killing and economic siege and settlement expansion, which only lead to further despair and frustration among the Palestinian people. All Israeli practices, beginning with the occupation of Arab land in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the continuing threats to the sovereignty of Lebanon, as well as the bloody campaign that is being waged against the Palestinian people, are all clear violations of the principles of international law, United Nations resolutions, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Kuwait calls on the Security Council to shoulder the international responsibilities entrusted to it by the United Nations Charter and to impose its will on the Israeli Government to respect its resolutions on the matter and to find a means or mechanism to provide protection to the Palestinians.

We stress the importance for the United Nations to continue in its central role in finding a solution to the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflict in all aspects, since this is a permanent responsibility of the United Nations, as provided for in all resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We call on the United Nations to continue its peacemaking efforts to end the current tragic situation and to resume negotiations towards a comprehensive peace settlement on all tracks. In this regard, Kuwait welcomes the efforts of the Quartet that led to the formulation of the road map. We hope that, following the Security Council's endorsement of the road map in resolution 1515 (2003), a mechanism will be found for all concerned parties to implement all its provisions.

Kuwait will continue to support the Palestinian people until they obtain the right to self-determination and create their own independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

In addition, we renew our call for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 in implementation of Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981). We also stress the illegal nature of all Israeli practices in the Golan and we call on Israel to resume negotiations at the point at which they were left off and to respect all commitments made in pervious agreements.

As for the concerns of our brothers in Lebanon, Kuwait continues to support their just demands. We call on Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territories in accordance with resolution 425 (1978) and to cease all threats to the sovereignty and security of Lebanon.

In conclusion, the Israeli Government must realize that achieving security is a principal demand and the right of all peoples and States of the region, and is not exclusive to Israel. Security cannot be ensured through violence and hatred against Arabs and Muslims or by inventing pretexts to continue occupying land. We must learn from the lessons of the past. Therefore we support the statement by the Secretary-General in his latest report (A/ES-10/248) that, after many years of bloodshed, dislocation and suffering, it must be clear to all of us, as well as to the parties, that the security of Palestinian and Israeli together can only be obtained through a just, peaceful, comprehensive and durable settlement based on resolutions of international legitimacy.

Mr. Pamir (Turkey): We align ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union on this agenda item. I would, however, now like to expound on some of our views on this subject.

As a region where peace and prosperity endured for centuries and where civilizations were born, the Middle East is not condemned to eternal strife. The manifold problems that beset this region should be addressed from a comprehensive perspective, and the international community should spare no efforts in its contribution to this effort. It is increasingly evident that the dynamics of the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians need to be redirected towards a genuine search for reconciliation. Indeed, the Palestinians and the people of Israel have suffered long enough, and neither of them deserves to live without real prospects for a peaceful future. As much as the leaders of both sides have a responsibility to bring long-desired peace to their peoples, so the international community has a responsibility to encourage the parties to move towards genuine dialogue and negotiations.

Unfortunately, despite all efforts and new mechanisms, the world has witnessed an unrelenting cycle of violence and terrorism during the past few years, which has taken all constructive initiatives hostage. In fact, the aggression between Israel and the Palestinians, which frequently spins out of control in the form of terrorist attacks and harsh retaliations, brings nothing but unspeakable despair and suffering to both peoples.

We have always strongly and unequivocally condemned all acts of terrorism and violence perpetrated against the Israelis and reminded the Palestinian Authority of its responsibility to take all necessary measures to halt violence. On the other hand, Turkey has also called on the Government of Israel to reconsider its methods of fighting terrorism.

We fully comprehend the security concerns of Israel. However, we have serious misgivings about the ongoing construction of the separation wall, or security fence, which has already exacerbated the dire living conditions of the Palestinians. We have reason to worry that this will also prejudice the two State solution. In our view, establishing security is, indeed, of paramount importance, but it is not the single most important objective. For instance, there is no doubt that every tangible improvement in the daily lives of the Palestinian people would be reflected positively in the security situation on the ground.

It is now time for the parties to break this repetitious and vicious cycle and pool their energies and determination to commit themselves to genuine dialogue.

The newly formed Government of the Palestinian Authority provides an opportunity to give much-needed impetus to the peace process. In this framework, the Quartet road map remains the most important document for breaking the current stalemate between the parties. A comprehensive settlement can only be achieved if both sides effectively implement with determination their respective obligations under the road map. As manifested by the recently adopted Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), the international community has already shown its resolve to help the parties in this direction.

Delaying settlement of the conflict widens despair and desolation. This, in turn, strengthens radicalism in the region and expands the breeding ground from which terrorists are recruited to a global scale.

We must also not overlook the significance of the other tracks in the stalled peace process. They are indispensable for a comprehensive settlement.

Turkey supports the recent initiative to streamline the work of the Fourth Committee and reduce the number of resolutions under the relevant agenda items regarding the Middle East. On the other hand, we believe that any change in the established approach should, first and foremost, be fully acceptable to the side directly concerned, that is, in this case, the Palestinian side.

As a final point, I would like to commend Mr. Peter Hansen and his team for their tireless efforts and accomplishments and reiterate my Government's support and commitment for the important humanitarian work being carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the region.

Mr. Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): This is the third consecutive year in which the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has deteriorated and worsened as a result of continued illegal Israeli activities against the Palestinian people and the continuation of violence. In spite of the difficulties on the ground, we still believe in the ability of the Palestinian side and the moderates on the Israeli side to achieve peace.

Jordan has diligently worked at all levels for a just and comprehensive solution that would achieve peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the principle of land-for-peace, the Arab peace initiative and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which is the basis for finding a solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees. Jordan also continues to support all efforts to give momentum to the political track and implement the road map that was launched at the Aqaba summit in June 2003. We reiterate the importance of taking serious steps to implement the road map and put the peace process back on track, steps that would guarantee the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish their own viable Palestinian State that would exist peacefully side by side with Israel.

My delegation has made its position clear before the Fourth Committee, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, during discussions on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly with regard to illegal Israeli practices against the Palestinian people and Israel's repeated violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention. We have also made clear the position of our Government with regard to the issue of Palestinian refugees and the importance of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Permit me to make a few additional points directly related to the future of the peace process.

The road map, to which Jordan has contributed, provides the necessary means to end the Israeli occupation, establish the Palestinian State and realize a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Based upon that, we welcomed the recent Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), which calls on all parties to implement the road map. Now that the international community has endorsed the road map, which has been accepted by both the Israeli and Palestinian parties, its implementation requires the genuine political will to achieve the final objective, namely, the two-State solution, which has been envisioned by the United States President.

Recently we witnessed an informal positive move in the Geneva Accord, which provides the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as the international community, a model for a final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based upon international legitimacy, and provides the possibility of such a solution.

On the other hand, we would like to stress that the appointment of a new Palestinian Government and Prime Minister gives hope to the political process. We welcome the undertakings by the Palestinian Prime Minister and his readiness to activate the peace process. However, that requires the international community to provide full support to the Palestinian Prime Minister and his team so as to enable them to implement their commitments under the road map. We also would like to call on Israel to implement its commitments under the road map and work to build confidence with the new Palestinian Government so as to enable it to fulfil its commitments as well. The establishment of a monitoring mechanism by the Quartet is essential to the success of all parties in the implementation of the road map.

In spite of some positive indications lately, of the resumption of the political process, Israel's settler policies and its continuing construction of the separation wall run counter to all efforts towards peace. Those policies have been futile since the moment they were conceived and have failed to realize their declared objective, namely, to provide security for the Israelis.

Furthermore, construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories represents a violation of the principles of international law, threatens the peace process and prevents the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian State on the territories occupied since 4 June 1967. That wall imposes a fait accompli on the ground and its construction should cease immediately, at least within the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel's continuation of its settler policies overshadows its intentions for peace. We call on Israel to cease all forms of settler activity and to dismantle the settlements that were erected after April 2001, in a manner commensurate with its responsibilities under the first phase of the road map, as an essential element to building confidence between the two parties. We are also awaiting Israel's implementation of its latest commitment to dismantle settlements encircling the Gaza Strip.

Further work should be done to put an end to the activities of extremists on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and to put an end to all forms of violence, including crimes that are being committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. Everyone in the region must be convinced that exclusive security policies, murder, destruction and the building of walls and other obstacles in order to separate one people from another, will achieve neither peace nor security.

We also would like to reiterate the clear position of the Jordanian Government regarding suicide activities against civilians from both moral and political perspectives. Not only do those activities cause the death of innocent civilians, which is condemned and rejected by us, but they also harm the Palestinian cause and the peace process.

Termination of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy and the achievement of the two-State solution through implementation of the road map are the only means to guarantee peace, stability and security in a region whose peoples look forward to the day when they can live in dignity, far from violence, killing and humiliation.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The debate on agenda item 37 on the situation in the Middle East comes at a moment of impasse and the absence of any negotiations towards the search for peace, amidst sporadic outbreaks of violence. No signs are to be seen anywhere of the possibility of entering into constructive and serious dialogue that could lead to a just and lasting peace that would benefit, first and foremost, all the peoples in the region, and thus, all humankind.

The ongoing deadly cycle of violence and reprisals has exacerbated political tensions and has taken an unprecedented toll in dead and wounded in recent months, most of them innocent civilians, including a considerable number of children. By the same token, we must take into account the tens of thousands of families mourning the loss of their loved ones and living in precarious conditions, constantly threatened with death and destruction. Violence, destruction and the use of military force can never in any way bring about a definitive solution to this conflict.

Fifty-six years ago, the Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which recognized the partition of and advocated the creation of two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish, which were to coexist in peace and harmony. This has not yet been fulfilled owing to the fact that, although the State of Israel was created in 1948, the creation of the State of Palestine still remains a pending issue.

The scenario before us is as follows.

Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese Arab territories are still illegally occupied by Israel, in flagrant violation of the numerous resolutions of this Assembly and the Security Council demanding the immediate return of those territories.

The Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and to the creation of their own independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, has yet to be respected.

Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories continue to expand, especially in the West Bank and in the surroundings of East Jerusalem, despite the demands of the international community to put an end to the establishment of new settlements, the confiscation of lands and the construction of the wall of separation. This wall represents, among other things, the virtual annexation of 16 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territories.

There is still no definitive solution to the deplorable situation of the approximately four million Palestinian refugees, both in and outside the occupied territories. This continues to be one of the issues on

which no progress has been made during the peace process negotiations that began in Madrid more than a decade ago.

The aggression perpetrated against the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic by the Israeli air force a few weeks ago, condemned by the vast majority of the international community, reminds us of the latent threat of a military escalation in the region. This threat cannot be disregarded as long as we remain far from the path of good-neighbourliness and pacific coexistence among nations.

The United Nations is faced with one of the most difficult tasks that has faced it virtually since its inception. It is embarrassing that the Security Council remains hostage to the dictates of one Power that uses its veto or the threat of the veto to prevent the practical implementation of the Council's own resolutions.

As the Secretary-General noted in the observations included in his report (A/58/416), what is needed is a definite and peaceful settlement of the issue of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order to achieve a broad, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, without disregarding the need for progress on the Syrian and Lebanese issues.

Likewise, we cannot set aside the concept reflected in the preambular section of Security Council resolution 1397 of 12 March 2002, which supports the existence in the Middle East of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Israel must end its occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and the areas of southern Lebanon that remain under the control of the Israeli army.

All Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Middle East must be fully complied with, without exception or discrimination, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

We should move forward on adopting more effective measures on the ground. One of these could be the deployment of an international force under the mandate of the United Nations to protect the civilian Palestinian population.

The United Nations must play an effective and genuinely impartial role in any negotiating process undertaken, without any interference deemed unacceptable by the parties, so that they can recover their confidence in the mediators.

In pursuing these efforts for achieving peace — as necessary as they are urgent — the international community can rely, as always, on Cuba's constructive contribution and its firm support and solidarity.

In this regard, my delegation calls on the Assembly to vote in favour of the two draft resolutions submitted this morning (A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28), which stress that the road towards peace in the Middle East is that of understanding and not of confrontation.

Mr. Haraguchi (Japan): The international community witnessed the acceptance of the road map by both the Israeli and Palestinian sides last spring, as well as the subsequent summit meeting held at Aqaba, and thus hoped that the long-awaited opportunity for fundamental progress on Middle East peace had finally come. However, the process has remained adrift since August, when conditions suddenly deteriorated again.

Now that the new cabinet of the Palestinian Authority has been formed under the new Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, the expectation that the implementation of the road map will resume has been heightened. Japan shares that expectation. Nevertheless, since we observed with great disappointment the rapid evaporation of the high hopes of six months ago, we cannot but take a cautious view of this progress, while welcoming the recent positive events. Even if the prospects for the Palestine track have not faded away entirely, the situation is now such that enormous efforts on both sides will be required for the prospects to brighten again.

Fortunately, many of those concerned have expressed their intention to reinitiate serious efforts towards progress, which we find encouraging.

First, Japan welcomes the fact that Prime Minister Qurei and Prime Minister Sharon have expressed their readiness to meet directly to resume implementation of the road map.

We also commend the United States Government for its continued commitment to the implementation of the road map and to working on persuading both parties, particularly Israel, to make renewed efforts in this regard. This involvement of the United States is

indispensable for achieving peace. In addition, we appreciate and strongly support the efforts of the Egyptian Government in serving as an intermediary in order to once again effect a ceasefire among the Palestinian factions.

Japan also welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), which we hope will add momentum to the search for peace.

Furthermore, we welcome the formal announcement of the Geneva initiative yesterday, since such an initiative provides hope for peace. We trust that this achievement will enjoy the broad support of the international community, including the parties to the conflict. All of the aforementioned efforts are positive and may be of help in improving the situation.

However, a serious question remains to be answered: if all these efforts bear fruit immediately, will that be sufficient to convince the Israeli and Palestinian people and world opinion that both parties have returned to the road map, which is the only viable plan for peace?

Regrettably, I am afraid, the answer is no. As long as the Palestinian Authority's actions against the extremists fail to yield results and the Israeli Government continues its settlement activities and its construction of a wall that crosses the Green Line, it will be difficult for mere words expressing a sincere commitment to achieving peace through the road map to be accepted. As long as both sides continue to insist either that the Palestinian side has to act first, or that the Israelis must first show good faith, peace will never be achieved. What is indispensable is courageous and insightful action by both parties.

Concerned Member States, including Japan, have repeatedly appealed for strong action by the Palestinian Authority against the extremists and for the termination of the settlement activities and of the construction of the wall beyond the Green Line by the Israeli Government. At the Security Council and here at the General Assembly appeals have repeatedly been made through statements and voting actions. Member States have also appealed bilaterally to the parties. Whether the parties have actually listened to these appeals and taken them to heart is doubtful, to say the least.

Let me make myself clear: Japan genuinely wishes that peace be realized in the Middle East; but, even if our appeals are unfortunately ignored by the parties, Japan will neither lose interest in the peace process nor end its support for peace efforts by the parties that are accompanied by concrete action. But in spite of that — or, rather, precisely because of that — I wish to ask both parties to stop and think about the significance of the fact that so many repeated and unanimous appeals for peace have been made by the international community.

I also wish to ask both parties to consider this: even after their commitment to the road map has been accepted as credible as a result of concrete actions by both parties toward peace, that credibility will not have been established once and for all, but will have to be tested many times over until peace is finally achieved. In other words, unless both parties are truly committed to the vision of two States living side by side in peace, a crisis of credibility may arise at any time.

The Government of Japan has extended support of various kinds to promote Middle East peace, such as humanitarian relief for the Palestinian people and reform assistance for the Palestinian Authority. One example of such assistance is the sponsorship of the confidence-building meeting that was held in Tokyo in May this year. This meeting was organized on the basis of our belief that, in order to achieve peace through dialogue and negotiation, there must be some level of confidence between the parties. As long as both parties understand the importance of confidence-building and are serious about pursuing that goal, we intend to continue our support of the process with perseverance. But in order for our support to make any sense, it is essential that both parties recognize the importance of such confidence-building and make an earnest effort to promote it.

It goes without saying that, to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East, we need to seek a comprehensive peace. Therefore, on the Syria-Lebanon track as well, we believe that if the parties shared an interest in seeking peace and worked to build mutual confidence upon the foundation of that shared interest, it would be beneficial for the resumption and future progress of peace negotiations for the Middle East.

Are we now facing opportunity and hope, or crisis and despair? I would like to reply that we face opportunity and hope. But the source of the power to transform such opportunity and hope into reality, if it exists, can only be found with the parties to the Middle East conflict themselves. Only in the presence of the

strong will of all parties to pursue peace, and the strength to make concessions and fulfil responsibilities for the sake of the ultimate goal of peace, can support from the international community be effective.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge once again all parties to the conflict to uphold their determination to pursue peace. Peace in the Middle East is directly connected to the peace and security of the entire world. As long as the parties respond to our appeal in good faith, the international community always stands ready to extend support for its progress.

Mr. Ndekhedehe (Nigeria): The situation in the Middle East continues to deteriorate and remains one of the most intractable problems on the agenda of the United Nations. Nigeria considers it a matter of regret that the cycle of strife, violence and instability persists, despite the collective efforts of the international community. Nigeria therefore condemns the spate of violence between the two parties.

Actions of violence and counter-violence are clear violations of the Madrid and Oslo accords and the international community cannot and should not allow this wanton destruction of lives and property to continue. All the parties and factions must realize that nothing meaningful or durable is ever attained through violence.

Nigeria believes that a just and lasting solution to the thorny question of a Palestinian State existing side by side with the State of Israel must be the basis for the establishment of sustainable peace in the Middle East, consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). We note the recent pledge by Mr. Yasser Arafat, recognizing the right of Israel to live side by side in peace with Palestine within secure borders. We therefore urge the parties to back the pronouncements of peace, reconciliation and harmony with concrete action that will ensure sustainable peace in the region.

Nigeria is committed to a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict and we call upon the parties to resume the peace process and move towards a lasting peace. Consequently, Nigeria, as it has done in previous years, calls on this Assembly to address the security concerns of the State of Israel, as well as the concerns of the Palestinian people.

Regarding the Syrian Golan Heights, we call on the parties to adopt flexible policies and resume peace negotiations under the principle of land for peace which, in our view, will guarantee long-term peace and security in the region. In this regard, Nigeria reaffirms its support for resolutions 56/31, 56/32, 57/111 and 57/128 on Jerusalem and Syrian Golan, as well as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 478 (1980).

On the issue of Lebanon, Nigeria notes that there has been some progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), following Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon. This has brought some degree of stability to Sheba'a Farms. The relative peace along the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon should be maintained and should not be violated by any of the parties.

Nigeria believes that the situation in the Middle East calls for compromise by all the parties pursuant to Security Council resolution 338 (1973). Accordingly, Nigeria will continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General in favour of the presence of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the region and we welcome the agreement between Syria and Israel in this regard.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Nigeria believes in the vision and engagement of the Quartet to fashion out an acceptable peace agreement for the region. We support Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and call on the parties to fulfil their obligations under the plan, in cooperation with the Quartet. Nigeria also supports the call by the Secretary-General for the establishment of a third-party mechanism to end violence and foster progress in the Middle East. Similarly, we endorse the idea of holding an international conference, as presented by the Secretary-General last year.

Nigeria commends the efforts of the President of the United States of America in bringing together the parties in the ongoing efforts to implement of the road map. We call on the parties to heed the advice of people of goodwill, abandon violence and pursue the peace process with sincerity. Accordingly, we support the vision of two States — the State of Israel, living within secure and recognized borders, and an independent, viable Palestine, both living side by side in peace and security, as affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

Nigeria welcomes the Geneva accord signed yesterday by prominent Israelis and Palestinians, which outlines comprehensive and detailed steps to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe that such a private initiative, while not a substitute for official diplomatic negotiations between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, should be commended and encouraged.

Nigeria also wishes to reiterate its commitment to the ultimate goal of a negotiated peace between Israel and Lebanon, on the one hand, and Israel and Syria, on the other, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We further reaffirm our support for the initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was endorsed by the summit of the League of Arab States in March 2002; the Madrid accord of 2001; and the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, Nigeria commends the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General in the region. We also commend the men and women who have served and are serving with UNDOF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their courage and commitment to the cause of international peace and security.

Mr. Jatoi (Pakistan): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on agenda items 37 and 38.

As in the past, the reports indicate a systematic pattern of unchecked violation of international humanitarian law and the ongoing deterioration of the political and security situation in the Middle East. Earlier this year, the adoption of the road map rekindled hope for a meaningful dialogue amongst the concerned parties, leading to the establishment of two independent States in the Middle East and thus putting an end to a long-standing dispute in the most volatile region of the world. However, violence has since resurged against unarmed civilians in the occupied territories, putting the process initiated after the adoption of the road map into the doldrums.

As mentioned in the Secretary-General's reports, the actions and practices of the occupation forces are in contravention of legal instruments pertaining to the situation of the people living in the occupied territories, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Fourth Geneva Convention prescribes specific obligations for an occupying Power in relation to the people living in occupied territories, described as "protected persons". The Convention prohibits the occupying Power from wilfully killing, ill-treating and deporting protected people. The report mentions frequent resort to all such practices, which have resulted in over 2,800 killings among Palestinians and of three civilian United Nations staff members.

A fundamental principle of international law flowing from the United Nations Charter is the illegality of the acquisition of territory by use of force. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and all subsequent international agreements on the Middle East have been based on this principle. The Quartet's peace plan is also based on the principle of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories in exchange for durable peace.

However, the continued settlement activity in the occupied territories, including the building of a separation wall, negates all agreed principles. Besides being illegal, all these activities entail enormous humanitarian suffering for the affected Palestinian people and seriously undermine the prospects for a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. The Secretary-General earlier described the separation wall and the settlements as serious obstacles to the achievement of a two-State solution. If remained unchecked, these activities would present the world irreversible faits accomplis, even before the final settlement under the road map.

The occupation forces often argue that their actions are necessary to fight terrorism and enhance security. It is difficult to agree with this contention. Security cannot be enhanced by intensifying repression and coercion. Instead, genuine security will flow only from Israel's accepting the right of the occupied people to uphold their separate identity and to exercise their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination.

Each member of the General Assembly has a stake in peace in the Holy Land on the basis of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and of Crown Prince Abdullah's peace plan. One viable way to achieve peace is the full and faithful implementation of the road map, which promotes the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders. It is our hope that the international community will remain engaged

with the concerned parties for the expeditious realization of this vision.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Over the past year, the situation in the Middle East has experienced much turbulence. The official launching of the road map had once brought new opportunities to the Israel-Palestine peace process. Later, regrettably, there have arisen serious differences on how to implement the road map between Israel and Palestine. To make things worse, there have been incessant violent clashes between the two sides, which have not only led to huge loss of life and property and cast a shadow over the peace process, but also seriously threaten regional security and stability.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East situation. The issue of whether the Palestinian people can enjoy their legitimate national rights is the key to a comprehensive and reasonable settlement of the Middle East question. The history of Israel-Palestine conflicts shows that the only correct choice for realizing lasting peace in the entire Middle East is to settle disputes through political talks. Countering violence with violence will only deepen the mutual hatred. It neither conduces to the Palestinians' noble objective of founding their own State, nor helps to ensure Israel's security.

Recently, the new Government of Palestine was formally established and a Security Council resolution endorsing the road map adopted. The international conference held yesterday on the Geneva initiative reflected the strong desire for peace of Palestinians and Israelis alike. All of these developments have created favourable conditions for breaking the deadlock in the Israel-Palestine peace talks and for easing the situation between them. We urge Israel and Palestine to seize the opportunity, resume peace talks as soon as possible and restart the implementation of the road map. The international community should also intensify its efforts to promote the peace process.

Achieving a comprehensive peace throughout the Middle East will not be possible unless appropriate solutions can be found to the disputes between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel. We hope to see early and meaningful talks between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel, aimed at finding mutually acceptable solutions based on the principles of the Madrid Conference.

The United Nations shoulders major responsibilities in maintaining world and regional peace and security and should therefore play its due role on the Middle East question. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the principle of land for peace have laid a solid foundation for a political settlement of the Middle East question and are important guidelines for moving the Middle East peace process ahead on the right track.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, China has closely followed developments in the Middle East and played an active part in promoting the Middle East peace process. In mid-December this year, an Asian-Pacific meeting on the question of Palestine will be held under United Nations auspices in Beijing. We will, as always, continue to support the efforts for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Middle East question. We are ready to work with the rest of the international community and to continue to make our own contributions to that end.

Mr. Nambiar (India): It has been over three years since the current phase of unrest and violence in the Middle East began. Since then, almost 4,000 Israelis and Palestinians have lost their lives in the raging conflict, to which most have not been party. Many others have been wounded or have lost their livelihoods and economic sustenance. The volatile situation has greatly exacerbated tensions in the region and elsewhere, contributing to a general sense of insecurity worldwide.

Along with the rest of the international community, India has held that both the Israeli and Palestinian sides must eschew violence and work towards a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. We have pointed out that the longer the conflict endures and the more intractable positions become, the harder it will be for the sides to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting solution.

The promises of a new start to a peace initiative launched at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in June 2003 were all too quickly extinguished by the actions of vested interests against any move towards peace in the Middle East. As a result, since last August the situation has been characterized by a dangerous spiral of violence and retribution.

In a recent briefing to the Security Council, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Kieran Prendergast pointed out that the peace process could

not be allowed to remain stalled, as in "such a dangerous environment, continued inertia could be deadly" (*S/PV.4861, p. 2*). Indeed, the absence of any political dialogue or initiative by the international community to restore the two sides on the path towards a political process has been a matter of great concern.

Fortunately, there has been a period of relative calm in the region over the past month-and-a-half. That, as well as the prospects of a meeting between the Prime Ministers of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, have given rise to some optimism. The Secretary-General, in his address on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, referred to these positive indications as "tender shoots" that "must be nourished" (*SG/SM/9037*). However small that opening may appear, the international community must urge the parties to exploit it for the sake of their peoples and for posterity.

The recent adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) endorsing the Quartet performance-based road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a step in the right direction. The Quartet must, with the backing of other concerned parties, move quickly to capitalize on the positive dynamics created by this period of relative calm. We hope that it will be helped in that effort by the positive environment created by the election of the new Palestinian Prime Minister and the gathering momentum of public support for the resumption of a political process.

India supports the Quartet road map as the only viable process that can promote a peaceful solution to the conflict. We call upon the parties to fulfil their obligations under the road map. The Palestinian Authority is required to give concrete content to its declared intent of establishing law and order, controlling violence and combating terrorism. Israel, on its part, should take immediate steps to build confidence by easing closures, removing settlement outposts, freezing settlement activity and halting the construction of the separation wall.

The Secretary-General, in his report, has referred to the construction of that barrier on occupied Palestinian land as "a deeply counterproductive act" (*A/ES-10/248, p. 7*). He has drawn attention to the fact that, in places, the wall deviates by more than 7.5 kilometres, and in its planned route by up to 22 kilometres, from the Green Line to incorporate Israeli settlements while encircling Palestinian areas.

India has stated before in this Assembly that, while we fully understand the legitimate right of all States to exercise self-defence, Israel's decision to construct such a wall in the occupied territories cannot be justified and must be reviewed. Not only would it cause socio-economic harm to the Palestinian people, but it is likely to impair future negotiations. The construction of the wall must not become an attempt to predetermine the outcome of any final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It must not impact adversely on the principle of land for peace called for in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

While saying this, India strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence. There can be no justification whatsoever for terrorism. Where these terrorist attacks are directed against unarmed civilians, women and children — what the Secretary-General has referred to as acts of wanton and deliberate terrorism — they become all the more reprehensible and detract altogether from the cause they purport to serve.

Admittedly, the situation is far from promising, but we must not give in to despair or desperation. The need of the hour is for the international community to re-engage its attention upon the situation in the Middle East with the clear focus of implementing in the nearest future the vision of two States living side by side within secure and recognized borders, as envisioned in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

A comprehensive solution to the Middle East must necessarily include the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Unfortunately, reports of the situation along the Blue Line are not very encouraging. The United Nations last open briefing to the Security Council drew attention to the continuing tense situation marked by events that raise serious concern. Each side has continued to violate the Blue Line, whether by air or land. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has played a sterling role in separating the parties. However, a lasting solution can only be the result of a consciously undertaken political process. We hope that the overall situation will allow such an initiative to be taken soon.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): The situation in the Middle East remains a source of deep concern for Ukraine.

Despite the high hopes for the renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace process after the emergence of the Quartet's road map, the violence and terror have continued to bring new deaths among the innocent civilian populations on both sides and the worsening humanitarian crisis has caused more human suffering among the Palestinians. Continued violations of the Blue Line and the air strikes by Israel against Syrian territory in October have further escalated tense and difficult situation in the region. Resolute action in full determination, aimed at bringing stability to the Middle East and at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace to the benefit of all peoples in the region, is needed by all concerned.

In his address to the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Peace in the Middle East, held last May in Kiev, the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma reiterated, that

> "as a founding Member of the United Nations, a Member of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a troop-contributor to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, Ukraine will continue to support comprehensively the international efforts aimed at establishing peace in the Middle East".

That meeting, convened in Ukraine at a time of renewed hopes following the formal presentation of the Quartet's road map to the parties on 30 April 2003, was in fact the first international forum at which that document has received the wide support of the United Nations Member States.

Ukraine firmly believes that the Quartet's road map, having taken into account the elements and approaches of many previous initiatives of the international community, provides Israelis and Palestinians with a real opportunity to achieve by negotiation a final and comprehensive settlement of the conflict. We fully support the road map's final goal of ending the occupation that began at 1967 and of the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. The basis for negotiations is well known and widely accepted by the international community — Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); the Madrid terms of reference; the principle of land for peace; and the previously signed agreements. I wish to reiterate the offer of Ukraine to provide good offices for holding peace negotiations on its territory.

It is very tragic that the initial encouraging progress in the renewed peace process was damaged by events on the ground. The leadership of both sides could have done more to seize this opportunity for peace in the Middle East. With the new Government of the Palestinian Authority now in place, we hope to see the reverse of the current tragic situation. The recent unanimous endorsement by the Security Council of the road map underscores once again that now there is no alternative to giving that plan new impetus and achieving through it the two-State solution.

We are encouraged by the recent emergence of the peace initiatives of civil societies aimed at complementing the road map with a vision of possible outlines of agreement on the final issues, which will be dealt with during bilateral negotiations. This promotes confidence between peoples and testifies to the growth of camps within Israeli and Palestinian societies willing to support both Governments in their search for lasting peace.

Ukraine continues to believe that the only way forward is through negotiation and the implementation by both sides, swiftly and in good faith, of their obligations under the road map. A meeting between Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ahmed Qurei would be very important in terms of establishing dialogue and agreeing on the areas of primary actions directed at bringing positive results to the peace process. Future progress will require bold steps to be taken by both sides aimed at addressing simultaneously the major concerns of the other.

Ukraine has stated on many occasions its condemnation and utter rejection of terrorism. We call on the Palestinian Authority to take all measures within its power to prevent terrorist attacks against Israelis, particularly suicide bombings, which run contrary to the interests of the Palestinian people. We welcome the steps by Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, with the support of Egypt, to achieve a new *hudna* by Palestinian groups and then a truce with Israel. This would pave the way to implementing Palestinian Authority's obligations under the road map to confront individuals and groups conducting and planning terrorist attacks.

We recognize the right of Israel to defend its citizens. However, we believe that extrajudicial killings should be stopped as they only fuel the violence and

provoke more terrorism. Israel should implement without delay its obligations in the area of settlements, thus removing one of the major obstacles to peace. We also call on Israel to stop the construction of the wall inside the occupied Palestinian territories and to improve the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza.

At this dramatic period in the history of Middle East, it is necessary to ensure that the new opportunities for progress in the peace process are not missed. The international community — the Quartet, the United Nations and the Security Council, countries of the region and other international players — has an important role to play in providing the parties with the support and cooperation they need in implementing the road map. In this regard, the establishment of a credible and effective monitoring mechanism becomes a priority.

Achieving a comprehensive Middle East settlement will be impossible without peace agreements on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks aimed at ending the occupation of the Arab territories and at a normalization of relations with Israel. We recall, in this regard, the importance of the initiative of the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah adopted by the Arab League summit in Beirut in 2002.

In view of the current tense situation in the Middle East and its potential for further escalation, threatening regional peace and security, we call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, respect for the principles of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

I would like to express the hope that, through the joint efforts of the parties concerned and the international community, the Middle East will become a region where all peoples live in peace, security, prosperity and dignity to which they aspire and which they deserve.

Mr. Taboul (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to extend our sincere thanks to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his report contained in document A/58/416 on the situation in the Middle East.

My delegation attaches the utmost importance to developments in and ramifications of the peace process in the Middle East, in view of their repercussions on international peace and security. The tragic developments in the region, arising from violations committed by the Israeli army and the intransigence of the Israeli Government, along with its frustration of all initiatives aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive solution, augur further complications in the region.

Israeli forces have occupied Arab territories in the Syrian Golan since 1967. They confiscate the lands of the Syrian Arabs and prevent them from exercising their agricultural activities by employing various methods of intimidation and torture, in total disregard of the resolutions of international legitimacy, including resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and others, and in flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, the principles of international law and international humanitarian law.

The achievement of a final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which is at the heart of Arab-Israeli, is essential to establishing comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. That should be achieved on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Israel must be made to commit itself to withdrawing completely from Arab territories occupied since 4 June 1967, including Jerusalem, occupied Syrian Golan and the Sheba'a Farms in Lebanon, in implementation of the principle of land for peace and other relevant international resolutions. The ongoing Israeli occupation of Arab territories represents an insurmountable obstacle to peace in the area.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): My delegation profoundly regrets that, after 33 years, the item on the situation in the Middle East remains on the agenda of the General Assembly without a solution in sight.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has further deteriorated and remains volatile. Despite numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the question of the occupied Syrian Golan has yet to be resolved. The sovereignty of Lebanon continues to be violated by Israel and requests for the release of all Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel have yet to be met. In addition, we now see the enormous challenge and uncertainty in Iraq following the war there. The complex and complicated situation in the Middle East should be of great concern to the international community in view of its potential to have grave repercussions for international peace and security.

At the core of the regional tension remains the continued illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We are all too familiar with the details and characteristics of the conflict. The consequences for the Palestinians have been particularly debilitating and tragic. The extent of the inhumane treatment of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation has been well documented in the reports of the United Nations and other independent parties. It has also been recounted by the Palestinian delegation and other concerned delegations in this Assembly and in the Security Council, including during the debate under agenda item 38 that has just concluded this morning.

Despite being democratically elected by Palestinians, President Yasser Arafat continues to be demonized, harassed and intimidated at every turn, accused of being ineffective and ineffectual, with every facet of his authority being systematically undermined and his own person subjected to all forms of humiliation, including the recent threat to deport or even eliminate him. Malaysia fully supports President Arafat and Prime Minister Qurei in their efforts to achieve peace and the creation of a viable, secure and independent State of Palestine.

The road map currently constitutes a workable platform for achieving comprehensive and durable peace, inter alia, on the basis of the two-State solution as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). However, with the unqualified preconditions imposed by Israel, as well as the ongoing construction of the illegal separation wall by Israel, my delegation is deeply concerned by the prospect of the road map's being rendered ineffective. We urge that the relevant Security Council resolutions be implemented, including resolution 1515 (2003). The current deplorable situation and oppression of Palestinians cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. It must be brought to an immediate end. The situation must not spiral out of control, with grave repercussions for regional and international peace and security.

Malaysia is equally concerned with the situation of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. We deplore the fact that the Arabs of the Syrian Golan continue to suffer under Israeli occupation, experiencing many deprivations, such as work restrictions, limited access to education and many other forms of humiliation and indignities of life under occupation. We consider the existence and indeed the further expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan as a gross violation of the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan remain a major obstacle to the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace process. We urge Israel to demonstrate its sincerity in its professed desire for peace by taking concrete and serious steps to comply with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967.

The stalemate and lack of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to implement those resolutions, on the basis of the principle of land for peace, are a cause for serious concern and constitute an additional negative element in an already volatile Middle East situation. The repeated renewals of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for almost 30 years now are indicative of the tense environment between the two sides.

The aerial strikes irresponsibly launched by Israel against the sovereign territory of the Syrian Arab Republic on 5 October further deepened the chasm and mistrust between both sides. Malaysia condemned that unwarranted act of aggression against a sovereign State, which was a flagrant and serious violation of the Charter of the United Nations, principles of international law and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. We believe that such provocative attacks will have serious ramifications on the already fragile Middle East peace process.

With regard to Lebanon, there has been some significant progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) following the departure of Israeli forces from the United Nations-identified withdrawal line in South Lebanon on 16 June 2000. However, the situation in the area remains volatile and is closely linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My delegation welcomes the constructive steps already taken by Lebanon to reinstate its full effective authority in the southern territory, including the deployment of its troops. We are confident that Lebanon will do its utmost to ensure a calm environment throughout the area concerned. These actions would bode well for further progress in the discharge of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Malaysia is greatly concerned about the reported serious breaches, as well as the air, sea and land

violations of the Blue Line by Israel. These may raise the possibility of a full-scale conflict along the frontier and could easily flare up into a serious confrontation drawing in several parties. Repeated Israeli violations of the Blue Line and Lebanese sovereign territory pose serious risks of a further deterioration of the situation. It is imperative for Israel to end these violations and to respect the Blue Line, in compliance with Security Council resolution 1496 (2003). We also strongly encourage both sides to engage in diplomatic efforts and constructive dialogue to defuse the tension and resolve outstanding issues following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line.

Malaysia is also particularly concerned over the situation in Iraq, which continues to have serious international and regional implications. Discontent over Iraq could create further complications in many countries. It could widen the gap and deepen the differences between the Muslim world and the West and may well swell the ranks of the discontented in the Muslim world, especially when attention is drawn to Iraq while the oppression suffered by the Palestinian people continues to be ignored. Unfortunately, such a situation will only afford extremist elements the opportunity and a convenient excuse to mobilize support for their militant cause. It would be indeed tragic for the region if the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were to be sidelined in pursuit of other political objectives in the Middle East.

My delegation reiterates its call for respect for the independence, sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and stability of Iraq and the neighbouring countries. We express our deep concern about the security situation prevailing in Iraq. The international community must exert its utmost efforts, on the basis of the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to assist the Iraqi people in ending the occupation, restoring the sovereignty and independence of Iraq and retaining control over their rights, land and economic, political and security institutions.

Given the unsettled and dangerous situation in the Middle East, my delegation remains committed to encouraging peaceful solutions to the multifaceted and complex problems faced by the region. We urge the parties concerned to seek a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); the Madrid terms of reference; the principle of land for peace; and implementation of all existing agreements between the parties towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. We urge Israel, in its own best interests, to look beyond its immediate security needs, important though they are, and to begin in earnest to engage its Arab neighbours in serious and meaningful dialogues towards the early realization of that comprehensive peace. We also call for the early restoration of the independence and sovereignty of Iraq.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 37.

A number of representatives have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements made in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Maleki (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today, the General Assembly heard a number of fabricated and baseless allegations against my country, made by the Israeli representative.

It is but an open secret to the international community that Israeli has constantly violated numerous accepted norms and principles of international law, in particular in the field of humanitarian law, by oppressing the Palestinian people under its occupation. We, therefore, can hardly find any regime as oppressive as the one we are speaking about.

Since my delegation has already pronounced its position on the issue at hand, I will not delve into responding to those baseless remarks at this stage. However, as a brief comment, I would like to make the following remarks.

The Israeli regime has never been a party to the internationally negotiated instruments on weapons of mass destruction or paid attention to the constant calls in other relevant forums. It is worth mentioning that the only existing obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is the non-adherence of Israel to the Treaty on the Non-

Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its continued clandestine operation of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities. In contrast, the Islamic Republic of Iran — as a party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction; and the NPT — is committed to all provisions of those instruments and to making declarations and accepting international monitoring by the competent international bodies, and has always demonstrated that it would not seek any weapons of mass destruction.

As to the other groundless allegations of the Israeli representative, I need to stress that the Iranian support for the Palestinian people has always been of a moral and political nature.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): We have heard the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran accuse my country of human rights violations and of aggression. Last week, by adopting draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.69 in the Third Committee, the General Assembly expressed serious concern at the continuing violations of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: the deterioration of the freedom of opinion and expression; persecution for the peaceful expression of political views; arrests and detention without charge and trial; continuing public executions; the use of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, in particular the practice of amputation and flogging; the forcible dissolution of political parties; the absence of due process of law; the denial of rights of persons belonging to religious minorities; systematic discrimination against women and girls; continuing discrimination against persons belonging to minorities, including against the Baha'is, Christians, Jews and Sunnis; the denial of free worship; and the disregard of property rights, among other things.

Regarding aggression, Iran is the most significant supporter of the Hizbullah, a terrorist organization, and has long been that organization's major patron, supplying it with funding, weapons and training, and also with the ideological inspiration and Islamic legitimacy necessary to ensure its broad appeal. It is also widely documented that Iran actively supports, finances, arms and trains terrorists sent to attack Israeli civilians by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Hamas organizations.

Iran maintains a policy of complete and total rejection of Israel's right to exist and has actively pursued the weapons capability necessary to actualize that policy. With the Shihab-3 missile, Iran is pursuing the capability to strike at Israeli cities as well as far into Europe and Asia. When it was paraded through the streets of Tehran, the inscription on the missile carrier declared that "Israel should be wiped off the map".

In light of its hostile intentions, as well as its long association with known terrorist elements, the regime's active pursuit of a non-conventional-weapons strike capability — including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons — Iran continues to be a source of tremendous concern to the international community. In fact, the adoption last week by the International Atomic Energy Agency of a resolution censuring Iran for the cover-up of its nuclear programme is yet another indication of Iranian subterfuge in that realm.

It is particularly distressing that the support of Iran for anti-Israeli terrorism and terrorism in general has continued even as the world has united to combat the common threat of terrorism. In the past year, the world has reawakened to the threat that terrorism poses to free societies throughout the world and has resolved to combat that scourge wherever it may breed — and it breeds in Iran.

When a regime such as that in Iran denigrates any other State for not adopting its definition of human rights or aggression, I would interpret that as a compliment. I would therefore like to thank the representative of Islamic Republic of Iran for his comments because, coming from him, these unrestrained attacks reassure me that Israel is indeed a nation which respects peace, justice and human dignity.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I would like to make an announcement concerning the programme of work of the plenary for tomorrow morning, Wednesday, 3 December 2003.

The General Assembly will consider the following agenda items: agenda item 17 (g), "Appointment of members of the Committee on Conferences"; agenda item 24, "Implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations"; agenda item 43,

"Return or restitution of cultural property to countries of origin", to take action on draft resolution A/58/L.20; agenda item 60, "Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit", to take action on draft resolution A/58/L.7/Rev.1; agenda item 106, "Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family", to take up a report of the Third Committee contained in document A/58/497; agenda item 38, "Question of Palestine", to take action on draft resolutions A/58/L.23 to A/58/L.26/Rev.1; and agenda item 37, "The situation in the Middle East", to take action on draft resolutions A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28.

Members are requested to consult the *Journal* tomorrow morning for further details.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.